

Prevalence of Gang-Involved Youth in NC

December 2011

Special Issue

Fact Sheet

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Introduction

Drugs, property crimes, guns, turf battles, senseless violence...these are all consequences of serious gang problems. North Carolina has youth gangs, youth gang members, and associates of gangs - all creating fear in citizens for safety in their neighborhoods, schools and social institutions. There are gaps in services available to address the needs of high-risk or gang-involved youth. The NC Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP) has taken broad steps in examining the extent of the problem and use of best practices to reduce gang involvement.

This report reviews the law passed in 2008 to combat the challenge of youth street gangs, the initiatives led by DJJDP and their progress to date, and what DJJDP data reveals with regard to the characteristics of gang members.

Background

In 2008, the NC General Assembly passed The North Carolina Street Gang Prevention and Intervention Act. Mandates include:

- Reliance on the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council (JCPC) bodies statewide to assess and address youth involved in gangs and/or at high risk for becoming delinquent;
- Establishment of community-based alternatives to commitment and detention; and
- A joint study of youth gangs by the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the DJJDP.

The mandated study was completed in December 2008 leading to concerns regarding the high prevalence of gang members/associates and a lack of available programs statewide. The findings from the DPI/DJJDP joint study are as follows:

- Significant levels of gang involvement, crime, and violence exist in schools across NC;
- There are insufficient alternatives to suspension programs that serve suspended youth – a gap found in many NC school systems; and
- Over 60% of schools had no gang awareness/education program for parents, and 35% of schools had no gang awareness/education program for school personnel.

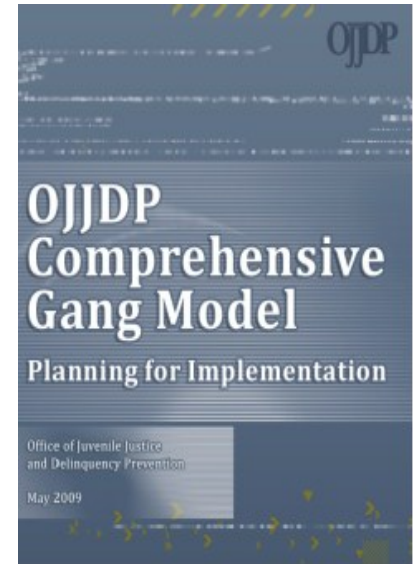
Recommendations that came from the DPI/DJJDP joint study are as follows:

- The NC State Board of Education should adopt a uniform gang definition and require reporting under school crime and violence guidelines.
- Funding for DPI and the JCPCs should increase to offer services to youth suspended out-of-school, especially for gang members/associates.
- Funding should be made available for programs to teach parents and school personnel the indicators of gang involvement and make them aware of programs/services available.
- School violence and gang prevention awareness must be improved; financial assistance for training needs should be supported by each Local Education Agency (LEA).



DJJDP's Approach to Prevent, Intervene and Suppress Gang Involvement

Through the DPI/DJJDP joint study efforts, DJJDP and DPI recognized a gap in knowledge across the State about the level of gang activity and a lack of gang-focused programs for juveniles. In 2009, the DJJDP received American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds via Byrne/JAG grants to launch cutting edge initiatives for assessing gang problems in local communities systematically and implementing evidence-based programs to serve high-risk and gang-involved youth. With leadership from NC Governor Beverly Perdue and through support from the NC Governor's Crime Commission (GCC), two major initiatives started in late 2009: 1) Community-Based Youth Gang Violence Prevention Project; and 2) The Governor's Gang Prevention and Intervention Pilot Project. Both initiatives were essential to plugging the gaps in services created by the loss in 2009 of Support Our Students afterschool programs (SOS), Governor's One-on-One (mentoring programming for court-involved youth), and reduction of JCPC funding due to budget cuts. The gang initiatives became critical to maintaining a continuum of services within the NC juvenile justice system focused specifically on the risk factors associated with gang involvement.



Community-Based Youth Gang Violence Prevention Project (Community-Based Initiative)

The purpose of the Community-Based Initiative is to provide financial and technical assistance to local communities to work in conjunction with their JCPC to implement the five strategies of OJJDP's Comprehensive Gang Model (CGM). Sites that completed a community gang assessment were required to select programs from OJJDP's Model Programs Guide (<http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/>) or OJJDP's Strategic Planning Tool (<http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/About/Strategic-Planning-Tool>). The JCPCs, as instructed by the CGM, led the process by acting as the Steering Committee and guided the Implementation Team to implement or expand existing programs proven effective to reduce gang involvement. DJJDP offered all 100 counties the opportunity to apply, but only those that applied and met the requirements were funded. Applying counties had three priorities to choose from:

Priority A: Assessment of Gang Activity

Applicants eligible for Priority A funding had not previously conducted a gang assessment and were seeking a clear and concise understanding of the local risk factors for delinquency and gang involvement. Completion of this priority allowed for informed decision-making in future program development. Priority A applicants who received funding identified community needs by relying on needs assessments, the JCPC annual planning process, and further study using Application Resources to assess the local factors that relate to gangs. It was required that a gang assessment be completed by the end of Year 1. JCPCs were eligible for Year 2 funding to build programming around the gang assessment findings.

Priority B: Implementation of evidence-based programs/practices that serve court-involved, high-risk youth, and/or identified gang members

This priority required evidence of a previously conducted assessment of the local gang problem. Under this priority, JCPCs were expected to work with currently funded program providers to continue and/or enhance evidence-based programs/practices for gang prevention/intervention based on the local gang assessment. Applicants demonstrated that evidence-based programs/practices had been developed to address problems identified in the gang assessment to receive funding.

Priority C: Assessment of gang activity and implementation of evidence-based programs/practices

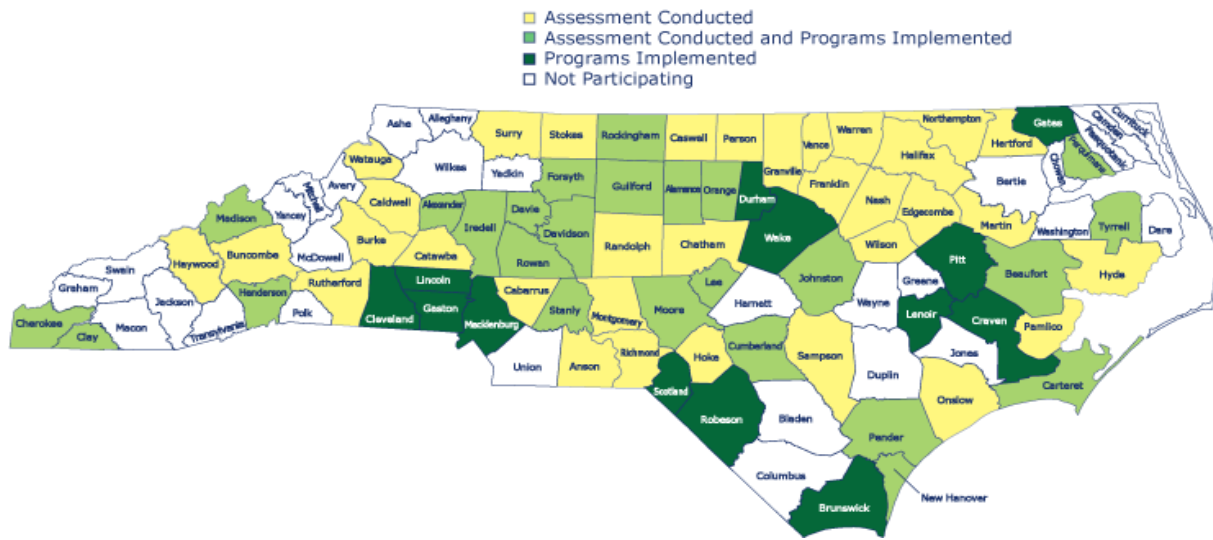
Some JCPCs had not previously completed a gang assessment, yet they had implemented evidence-based programs/practices for addressing juvenile delinquency and gang prevention/involvement. JCPCs who had not completed a gang assessment applied for Priority C funds to conduct an assessment and to enhance local, evidence-based programs/practices. Applicants under this priority demonstrated completion of a gang assessment by the end of Year 1 to be eligible for continued program funding in Year 2.

Community-Based Initiative (cont.)

The map below shows the 71 counties that participated in the Community-Based Initiative: 33 counties conducted only a gang assessment (Priority A); 25 counties conducted assessments then implemented evidence-based programs (Priority C), and 13 counties with existing assessments immediately began programming (Priority B).

One hundred forty jobs were created and, to date, 2,940 admissions received services under this initiative. Service needs of these youth are summarized later in this report.

Community-Based Youth Gang Violence Prevention Project



Gang Prevention and Intervention Pilot Project (Pilot Project)

This Governor-led Pilot Project supports two Youth Development Centers (YDCs) and surrounding “catchment” counties with curriculum, training, aftercare, and evidence-based community outreach to deter gang involvement. Funding for this initiative will cease in 2012. There are two main purposes of the Pilot Project:

Fund transition/re-entry services for gang-affiliated youth exiting the YDC

Target communities in catchment areas of the two YDCs collaborate to develop a solution-focused, extensive systems improvement plan within each county. The plan is developed using information available from any source as to the needs, gaps, etc. for the purpose of reducing gang-related juvenile crime. Re-entry and aftercare transitional services, provision of 24/7 supervision plans for youth returning to the community, accountability measures, and a formative evaluation of the implemented plan were requirements for funding. Of special interest under this funding option were programs that offer vocational training, job training, job placement and either full- or part-time employment.

Fund prevention/intervention best practices for youth at risk for gang involvement or those already associated with gangs in the community

Programs located in the YDC catchment counties are funded to develop and implement evidence-based programs/practices that serve court-involved, high-risk youth, and/or identified gang members. This priority required proof of a previously conducted community gang assessment and engagement with the local JCPC throughout the funded period.

The participating YDC’s staff implemented the evidence-based REAL curriculum (Real Experiences About Life) modules and provided approximately 100 hours of instruction for each participant. Preliminary results show positive gains in youths’ pre- and post-assessments with regard to levels of gang involvement, attitudes towards gangs, self-efficacy and readiness to change. A formal, external evaluation of this program with a comparison YDC site is currently in progress.

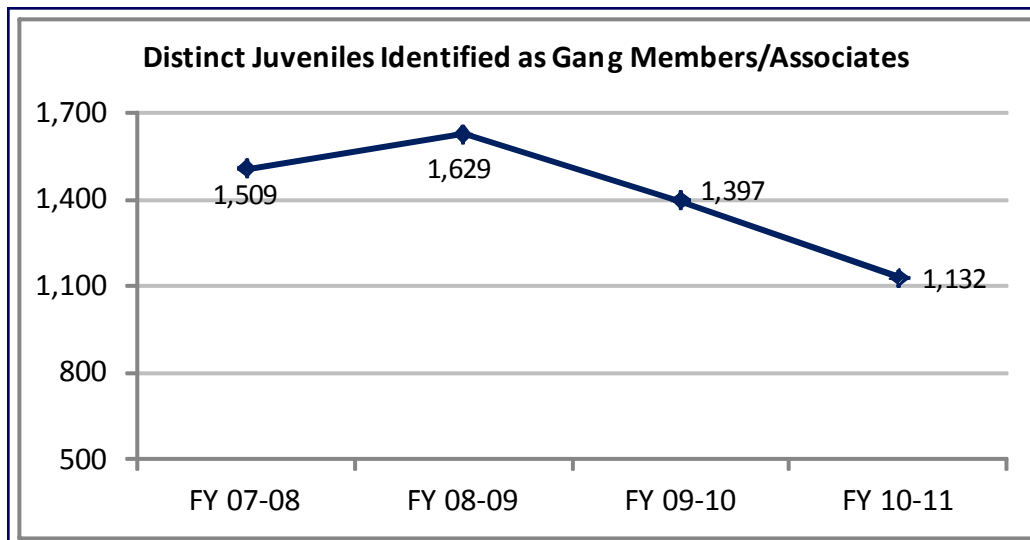
Forty-six jobs were created by this funding. To date, 350 admissions to this program received prevention/intervention services, the REAL curriculum, and/or re-entry services.

Prevalence of Gang Membership/Association in NC

In recent years, DJJDP has tracked levels of gang involvement throughout the juvenile justice system. The proportions below show that the deeper a youth penetrates the juvenile justice system, the more likely he/she is at risk of gang involvement. Gang members/associates represent:

- 7% of juveniles for whom DJJDP received a delinquent complaint,
- 13% of juveniles who reached disposition in juvenile court,
- 21% of juveniles admitted to detention, and
- 38% of juveniles committed to Youth Development Centers (YDCs).

The number of identified gang members/associates in NC's juvenile justice system has declined 30.5% since FY 08-09. DJJDP recognizes that the increased scrutiny on the problems gangs present and funded programs/efforts across NC have a correlation to the reduction in juvenile gang members/associates.

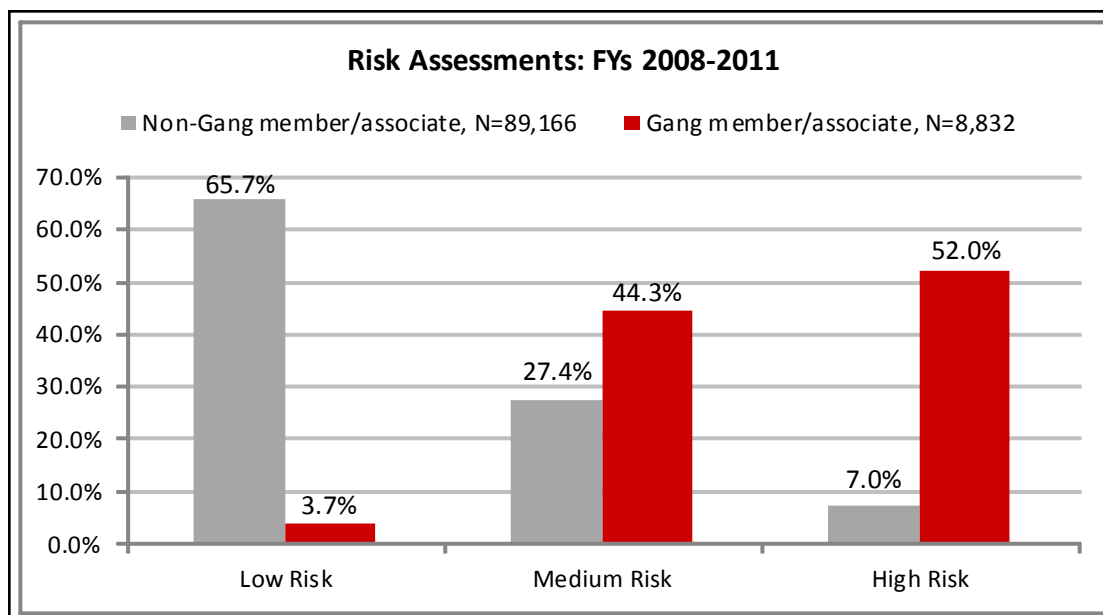


One way to measure the impact of gang involvement requires probing the group of identified gang members/associates' juvenile delinquency histories. Other methods are discussed below with regard to risk and needs assessments comparisons. On average, 7% of distinct juveniles identified as gang members/associates have delinquent complaints received in any given year (equivalent to crimes for adults). **This small group is responsible for over 20% of all delinquent complaints received.**

To further analyze offending patterns among those not identified as gang members/associates versus identified gang members/associates, the types of complaints filed are important to consider. For the non-gang member/associate group, 19% of the delinquent complaints filed were felony class offenses; whereas, 34% of delinquent complaints received for the gang member/associate group were in the felony class. Programs in NC to prevent and intervene with delinquency development must continue to focus on gang-identified juvenile offenders.

Risk characteristics of identified gang members/associates across NC

All youth on whom complaints are filed with the DJJDP are assessed for risk of reoffending and service needs (needs assessments discussed in the next section). Risk assessments take into account prior offending history, assault offenses, runaway history, alcohol/drug abuse, school problems, peer relationships and parental supervision ability. Although the risk factors for gang involvement are similar to the risk factors for serious delinquency, gang members/associates tend to have more of them and, thus, are at higher risk of reoffending. The data in the chart below tells us that **52% of the gang member/associate group** is high-risk, while only **7% of the non-gang member/associate group** consisted of juveniles who are high-risk of recidivism.

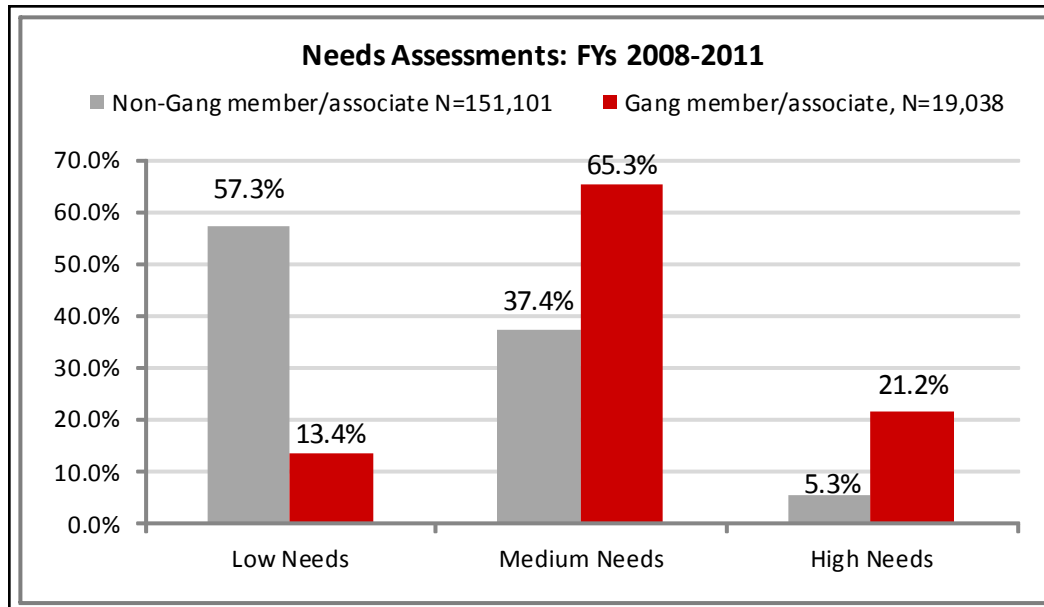


Each of the risk items (questions) is a factor related to future offending. Youth identified as gang members/associates are more likely to have serious school problems (drop out, expulsion, long-term suspension); nearly 8 out of 10 gang-identified youth have this characteristic. Gang-identified youth had prior referrals to juvenile court, prior assault complaints, substance use/abuse history, have run away from their home or placement, and have parents that are willing but unable to supervise their child(ren) adequately **twice as often** as the non-gang-identified youth. Lastly, the youth identified as gang members/associates have a prior felony or A1 misdemeanor adjudication **three times as often** as the non-gang-identified group.

Problem Behaviors	% of Non-Gang Member/ Associates Assessed N=89,166	% Gang Member/ Associates Assessed N=8,832	Proportional Difference
Two or more prior referrals to intake	22.1%	50.6%	2x
Prior felony or A1 misdemeanor adjudication	7.4%	23.2%	3x
Prior assault complaint(s) received	16.6%	32.0%	2x
Substance use and/or abuse, assessment and/ or treatment needed	30.0%	67.2%	2x
Serious school problems	47.3%	77.2%	1.5x
Runaway from home or placement	15.0%	37.4%	2x
Parents are willing but unable to supervise	20.9%	48.8%	2x

Needs characteristics of identified gang members/associates across NC

Every youth who goes through intake receives a risk and needs assessment. Per DJJDP policy standards, youth under supervision receive an updated needs assessment every 90 days. Hence, there are thousands more needs assessments to analyze over the past four years. Below is the comparison of the level of need for non-gang member/associates and gang member/associates. Similar to the overall risk level displayed above, the level of need is also in sharp contrast for gang members/associates compared to non-gang members/associates.



The following needs assessment data show that there are a few factors that distinguish between the non-gang member/associate and gang member/associate groups. Gang-identified youth are more likely to be functioning below grade level or have unserved Exceptional Children's needs, mental health issues, marital/domestic discord in the home, parents/guardians with marginal or inadequate parenting skills, and household members who use or abuse drugs. Lastly, gang-identified youth have parents/guardians involved with the criminal justice system and/or are gang members themselves nearly **twice as often** as non-gang-identified youth.

Areas of Need	% of Non-Gang Members/Associates Assessed N=151,101	% of Gang Members/Associates Assessed N=19,038
Generally functioning below grade level, needs an educational evaluation or has unserved Exceptional Children's needs	13.0%	25.4%
Behavior indicates a need for additional mental health assessment or treatment	35.6%	52.8%
Marital/domestic discord in the home and/or domestic violence in the home	28.2%	38.7%
Marginal or inadequate parenting skills	61.4%	87.5%
One or more household members abuse alcohol or drugs	12.6%	18.3%
Parents, guardian or custodian and/or siblings are incarcerated, on probation, on parole, and/or gang members	8.7%	16.1%

Fact Sheet

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Conclusion

The DJJDP and DPI joint study prompted by The North Carolina Street Gang Prevention and Intervention Act revealed the following: significant levels of gang activity, crime, and violence in and around schools; lack of training/awareness for school personnel, community members, and parents; and gaps in services for youth involved in gangs or at risk of joining gangs.

The offending pattern, risk factors, and service needs areas of gang-identified youth are all highly elevated compared to non-gang members/associates. The major service needs for gang-involved youth, as discovered through the analysis of over 200,000 risk and needs assessments, are as follows: family therapy/home-based family interventions; parent training/education; alternatives to suspension (e.g., day reporting centers); dropout prevention programming (e.g., tutoring, mentoring, etc.); and substance abuse treatment.

Recommendations

DJJDP urges the NC Governor's Gang Task Force to recommend to the General Assembly to continue funding of the Community-Based Youth Gang Violence Prevention Project and the Gang Prevention and Intervention Pilot Project in 2012 for sustaining evidence-based programs and practices in the places where community gang assessments showed serious gang problems. Preliminary data suggest that these two DJJDP gang initiatives are showing promise as effective approaches to combating youth gang involvement in North Carolina. Thanks to community efforts such as these gang initiatives, North Carolina has seen the State's delinquency rate decline over the past few years. Even with these great gains communities are continuing to battle the harmful consequences of gang activity, especially delinquency and violence. Furthermore, with these projects ending in 2012, DJJDP is concerned that much of the progress made over the last two years in battling youth gang involvement will be lost.